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**The Functions of Journey and Ascent in Selected Short Stories in
Margaret Drabble's *A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman***

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Introduction

Margaret Drabble, the author of prize-winning fiction, has received most of her popularity and critical acclaim through her novels. Due to this, her short fiction, written over the span of almost forty years and presently amounting to fourteen short stories, has suffered the lack of due attention. Importantly enough, it is namely through her short stories that the changing social circumstances in the British women's lives are to be traced so easily. Drabble's short fiction, which has for the first time been located in a single collection and entitled *A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman: Complete Short Stories* (hereinafter referred to as *A Day in the Life*), is valuable, among other things, in that it shows the dynamically changing lifestyles over the second half of the twentieth century. *A Day in the Life* carries the reader through the turbulence of the 1960s, the booming social lives and women's careers of the 1970s, to peaceful getaways in pre-retirement years of the late 1990s. The characteristic themes of Drabble's novels, which include feminism, class conflicts, women's social standing, self-imposed loneliness and many others, appear in almost all short stories in the collection (Fernández, XV:2011).

The aim of the present thesis is to study the functions of journeys and ascents which continuously appear throughout the short stories. It is important to analyze these features for they are employed by the author to portray the inner, psychological developments the protagonists achieve. Thus, the terms of journey and ascent are used in the present thesis in both their literal and figurative meanings. The literal meaning of the journey implies of course some geographical movement, a travel to another place. The metaphorical meaning is the kind of inner change which occurs in the protagonists during their journeys. In the case of the ascent, its physical meaning implies the process of rising up a hill, a mountain or a tower, but metaphorically the ascent refers to *spiritual upheaval* leading to the protagonists' newly-articulated strength or freedom. It should be mentioned that although both the journey and the ascent are used when portraying the themes of self-recovery, it is the former element which is employed more frequently. This causes the fact that Chapter 2, where the core analysis of the four themes is presented, features more journeys than ascents.

The subject I approach has not in any profound way been analyzed before. Donna Seaman mentions in her review in *Booklist* (2011) that journey and ascent are “a favorite conceit” in Drabble’s short stories; however, the reviewer does not go beyond just mentioning this. The only available critical source, which looks at the protagonists’ journeys from the psychological point of view, is “Ugly Ducklings and Swans: Margaret Drabble’s Fable of Progress in the Middle Years” by Margaret Morganroth Gullette (1983). Gullette names the bildungsroman features in several novels by Drabble and shows that they occur through the stages of adolescence, young womanhood and the middle years (1983:286). Throughout the different short stories in *A Day in the Life*, analogous phenomena are observed. In the stories, adolescent, young and middle-aged protagonists embark on the journeys or tackle high hills or towers, during which they – unconsciously at first – achieve a clearer understanding of their selves and their needs, reach important conclusions or take the liberty for the deeds they have never before dared to make.

The peculiarities of the short stories’ setting, development of plot and narrative style seem to highlight the crucial roles of journeys and ascents in the protagonists’ articulation of their selves. The stories written in the 1960s and the 1970s tell of the events which occur within one day, but the narrated time in the later stories ranges up to two weeks. The journeys and ascents are dynamic in that they unfold in parallel to the narrated time and allow for the correlation between the geographical and the psychological aspects.

The narrative technique in the short stories is predominantly omniscient narration. This narrative form, which keeps the reader informed about the protagonists’ inner thoughts, creates a rather small distance between the narrator and the reader. Focalization varies throughout the stories, but most frequently is through the protagonist or of heterodiegetic nature. “The Gifts of War”, analyzed in Chapter 2, is technically the most complicated short story in the collection. It is narrated in two distinctive styles, each depicting the outlook of each of the two protagonists. It is the only story in which the distance between the reader and the protagonist is large. Third-person narration dominates in all but the last short story in the collection, “Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale”. This story is narrated in the first person, and includes frequent instances of the narrator who, being one with the author, engages in a direct dialogue with the reader. The

discussion of this and other narrative details follows on page 18. The author employs irony and sarcasm, mocking the protagonists' twists of such notions as personal victory and achievement ("A Pyrrhic Victory", "A Success Case").

In the present essay, I have to ignore many significant themes highlighted by the writer in her short stories. I do not go beyond just mentioning the author's subtle feminism, to paraphrase Fernández' term "cautious feminism" (2011:XV), which is the delicate and unaggressive treatment of feminist issues for which she has become famous. Drabble's unobtrusive application of the classical feminist discourse is revealed in her attitude to the women's acquired independence and their drastic movement up the social ladder. To continue, the themes which are repeatedly mentioned in the present essay – the women's multiple social roles and their rapidly emerging careers – are not analyzed thoroughly enough. The rhetorical analysis of the short stories is another interesting area which I have to ignore in the present essay. Instead, I concentrate on the functions of the psychological journey and ascent which create peculiar interplays with the geographical journeys and ascents the protagonists accomplish.

The method employed in the present thesis is close reading, with special attention to the functions of journey and ascent. These functions are located and analyzed in the context of the short story they appear in, and then compared and contrasted with the ones present in the other stories. The bulk of my analysis is based on seven short stories in the collection. The stories are chosen with regard to the vividness of the function of journey or ascent in the protagonists' changed attitude to themselves and the others.

Chapter 2 of the present essay locates the four themes, which highlight the functions of journey and ascent that the protagonists complete. The themes were chosen out of the most vivid instances of journeys and ascents being fundamental in the protagonists' re-assertions of their strengths and freedoms, which were selected out of the fourteen short stories in the collection. Specifically, the themes include a regained independence, the evasion from marital troubles, the achievement of victory, a flight from loneliness. The analysis appearing in each theme is supported by the criticism on Drabble's fiction, and/or by the secondary sources approaching the motifs of journey and ascent in other literary works. Chapter 3 is devoted to the study of the structure of the protagonists' psychological journeys and the different perspectives in the

portrayal of some phenomena throughout the short stories. In (3.2), I introduce the elements of abyss, plateau and ascent which underlie the structure of the women's psychological movement and create a peculiar interplay between the psychological and geographical domains of the journey. In (3.3) I study the multiple angles which lie in the author's ways of approaching one and the same phenomenon in the protagonists' personal lives from obviously different angles.

In Discussion and Conclusions, I make a short overview of the present essay and contemplate on the social roles of Drabble's women protagonists. Finally, I suggest future areas of research on Drabble's short fiction.

Chapter 1. Overview of the Short Stories

As mentioned in the Introduction, *A Day in the Life* consists of the fourteen short stories, written by Margaret Drabble in the course of her literary career, almost simultaneously with her novels. Published separately in different literary journals between 1964 and 2000, they were only recently gathered in one book and published under the title *A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman: Complete Short Stories* (2011).

When reading the short stories, it is hard not to notice certain “organizational” similarities and parallels appearing in the authorial judgment and the development of the plot. With parallels and manifold angles of the author’s representation explored in Chapter 3, the present chapter concentrates on the organizational features, which pertain to the totality of the short stories in the collection. These organizational features include commonalities in setting, depiction of protagonists and plot development.

1.2 Setting

The short stories’ settings share some common features. In all but one story in the collection, “Les Liasons Dangereuses” (Drabble’s earliest short story, published in 1964), the events in the diegesis, the narrator’s account of the story, unfold against the background of a geographical journey or ascent which the protagonists make. The journeys and the ascents have different functions depending on the decade of their creation. Thus, the stories of the 1960s tell of the journeys and ascents completed by the protagonists who begin to distance themselves from the emerging problems in their lives. During the ascent up the tower in Morocco, some protagonists start contemplating the universal human bonds rather than on their failing marriages (“Hassan’s Tower”, 1964). Others take walks, during which they explore their true states of being, which result in their finding precarious but still efficient remedies for loneliness (“A Voyage to Cythera”, 1967), accidentally renew previous relationships (“Faithful Lovers”, 1968) or come to understand the futility of the existing ones (“Crossing the Alps”, 1969). The most striking commonality is that the protagonists of the 1960s are still rather young (before thirty), and the burdens they have are not as heavy as the ones their “colleagues” from the next decades have.

The stories written in the 1970s employ the journeys and the ascents for slightly different aims. They investigate the issues of multiple obligations which accompany women’s booming

careers. The female protagonists embark on the journeys to help themselves renegotiate their positions in the family, the “side effects” of their profuse love for their children and the origins of their disdain towards their husbands. The four stories written between 1970 and 1975 feature the women experiencing problems in their marriages. Jenny Jamieson’s husband is envious of her popularity as a TV presenter and starts to verbally attack her (“A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman”, 1973), whereas an unnamed protagonist in “The Gifts of War” (1970) goes through the daily tortures of living with an alcoholic husband. What is important, the short stories in this section do not all have to do with married women and by no means do they view marriage as a central element in a woman’s life. Themes which Drabble works with over this decade include the combinations of multiple social roles in women and its side-effects as applied to family relationships and children’s upbringing (“Homework”, 1975). As I discuss further in my essay, it is important to note that Drabble does not supply the reader with proof or disproof of stereotypes but rather accentuates the uniqueness of each human situation (Section 3.3).

Stories which fall under the latest period of the author’s short fiction are written between 1989 and 2000 and amount to four short stories. The common metaphorical pattern, which is at the same time the most striking peculiarity, is what I call Drabble’s recipe for reconciling with one’s past. As the stories in the present section show, reconciliation is achieved once the attempts of escaping it lead to facing it. Thus, in “The Caves of God” (1999) Hannah, a prominent geneticist and the Nobel prize laureate, gathers up her courage and travels to Turkey to find her ex-husband Peter, whom she earlier avoided so persistently. She finds reconciliation once she comes to think that her past “forgave her” (p. 205), but in fact it is her own courage to face her ex-husband which gave her reconciliation.

The most obvious similarities in the stories of this decade are the age of protagonists (50+) and their attempts to either chase or forget their past, both of which occur simultaneously and finally lead to reconciliation. In “Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale” (2000), Mary Mogg’s way of establishing the dialogue with her past also turns out to be the thing she had earlier been dreading most – returning to the countryside where the nature had “betrayed” her and her heart was broken. The short story’s development is discussed in Chapter 2 of the essay.

1.3 Depiction of protagonists

To proceed with the discussion of the organizational commonalities between the short stories, I would like to comment on Drabble's style of depicting her protagonists. In all but two stories in the collection, the protagonists are women. Analyzing the protagonists, the reader may get an impression that they all offer manifold perspectives of how the life of one and the same person, an average British woman living in the second half of the twentieth century, might turn out. In one story, the reader learns about a lonely young woman who feels happy when she observes the idyllic picture of an unknown woman's happiness. In another story, one almost instantly identifies the Cinderella plot, but then learns that seemingly perfect lives with careers, children and good looks do not guarantee the stability of relationships or inner balance. One encounters the women who are mistreated by their husbands, each in her own way, but leading to similar results – anxiety, insecurity and the diminished self-esteem. Stories depicting the recklessness and absent-mindedness of young girls who think they own the world may seem to tell the pre-story. In this way, viewed in their totality, the short stories in *A Day in the Life* offer a comprehensive account of the continuity of life.

From absent-mindedness and recklessness of the burden-free youth, through the drudgeries of marriage, lovers and finally, a regained independence by the age of 50 or 60, the stories seem to cover all periods in a woman's life. The last short story in the collection, "Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale", can be viewed as a culmination of the fictional woman's career and her entering the stage of retirement. This is discussed in greater detail in Section 2.2 of the essay.

Frequently, the important information on the protagonists' lives is disclosed in passing, as if unwillingly, or even on purpose withheld from the reader. Sometimes the important circumstances of a character's life are deliberately not revealed but become evident from what is highlighted in the life of the other characters. This method of foregrounding and concealing the information is particularly vivid in the narrative organization of "The Gifts of War" which is discussed in Section 4.5.

1.4 Plot development

The third feature which unifies the short stories in the collection is the style of plot structure and development. Narrative time is short – from several hours up to several days, whereas the narrated time, or the time in the diegesis, may range to several decades. An interesting point to discuss would be the type of narrative Drabble uses – is it a broken, non-linear, or straight narrative? Proceeding from the formal criteria, the short stories in question follow a straight narrative line in that the plot develops according to the chronologically aligned timeframe. However, the events in the narrated time, which tell of the things that have been happening to the protagonists over the years of their lives and which lead to the inner conflict they experience now, make the overall picture of Drabble's narrative style more complicated than it may seem. One can frequently see how the narrated and the narrative time diverge, but then join in one at the story's end. "The Gifts of War", analyzed in Chapter 2, is a good example of the story, in which the narrated and the narrative time blend into one once the diegesis achieves the culminating point.

Intertextuality, which shows the connection between one text and another, is a frequent occurrence in Drabble's short stories. The intertextual links in form of allusions are conspicuous between the short stories "Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale" and "Dower House at Kellynch: A Somerset Romance", but also "Faithful Lovers" and "Hassan's Tower". The intertextuality forges a peculiar unity between the short stories in the collection in that it offers multiple angles and creates an interactive cross-story dialogue. The analysis of multiple angles and other peculiarities of the author's varying judgments and evaluations is presented in Chapter 3 of the present essay.

The art of Drabble lies in her skill to portray the life-changing events in simple terms, against the background of routine, if not trivial, events. Drabble's protagonists have appointments with doctors, take trains to work or home, go on hiking tours or to the countryside, but in spite of the lack of originality in these actions, they become able to articulate the things which inhibit their psychological ascent.

As my analysis will show, the protagonists' psychological ascents only become possible once the geographical one is accomplished. In this way, each story seems to be proof to the statement that the disposition of the body is the disposition of the soul. What is different though

is what causes the protagonists' journeys: a simple need to get to the specific geographic place or a wish for seclusion? As my analysis will show, the former cause is seen in the younger protagonists: they travel to get to doctor's appointments, to stores, or climb up the hills because they are told to. The older protagonists, on the contrary, seek seclusion as a reward for the years of miserable marriages or frustration.

Chapter 2. Functions of Journey and Ascent in the Selected Short Stories

Theme I. Journey as a Means of Regaining Independence in “A Merry Widow” and “Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale”

2.2 Theme overview

In this section, I will explore how the function of the journey is used to convey the protagonists' inner maturation and growth, which finally leads to their reestablished independence. The two stories I am going to analyze in this section involve different kinds of independence. In “A Merry Widow”, Elsa Psalmer becomes independent from the harassing and despotic husband whom she for years endured. In case of “Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale”, this is the time journey of a middle-aged woman to the summer of heartbreak forty years ago which is the assertion of her strength and fortification before approaching old age and retirement.

The rhetoric of the two short stories I am about to analyze shares certain common features. Both abound in the descriptions of the English countryside, Dorset and Somerset respectively. The two protagonists carry their flower books, bird books, choose roads, mark roads on the maps, go on long walking journeys, wander in the woods. Each for their own reasons, they are both happy to get lost in the beloved landscapes, discover new routes, but most importantly, be on their own. The most popular rhetoric device in both stories is metaphor. Metaphors occur on the syntactic levels of phrases, clauses and sentences, as well as on the pragmatic level of the short story as a whole.

2.3 Earlier research

It is exactly in the present theme that the mentioned research by Gullette can be applied most relevantly. Gullette studies the motif of psychological transfiguration, a “bildungsroman of the middle years”, on the basis of Drabble's novels *The Waterfall*, *The Needle's Eye*, *The Realms of Gold*, *The Ice Age*, *The Middle Ground* (1983:293). According to the author, the bildungsroman features in Drabble include the element of psychological and spiritual ascension which is achieved through the admittance and reconciliation with one's past. The Drabble style of bildungsroman, which is unlike the traditional ones supplied by Dickens and Austen, Gullette informs, is “the novel of maturation, of journeys and discoveries, of obstacles that exist to be

leaped over” (1983:295). According to her, Drabble’s motifs of the upward psychological movement testify to her belief in “private and continuous transformation” which occurs through adolescence, young womanhood and the middle years (1983:286).

Another angle, from which traveling as a vehicle for women’s self-exploration has been viewed in earlier research, is the Afro-American women’s narratives. Carolyn A. Naylor’s studies how Black women negotiate their self-knowledge and independence on the basis of four landmark novels by African-American writers: Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison (1982). In Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Naylor views the female protagonist’s journey as a circle leading to self-realization and personhood. The journeys of the male protagonists in *The Man Who Went Underground* by Wright and *The Invisible Man* by Ellis are caused by the oppression of the political system. The article author draws on the major differences of treating journeys by female and male authors. In female authors, their female protagonists more clearly understand the need of self-knowledge under the circumstances of depersonalization and inhumanity (1982:38).

This research shows that the geographical dimension has earlier been applied to women’s self-exploration and traveling has been shown to help (re)negotiate the female self. What the analysis in the present theme aims at is elaborating on the specific instances in which the women’s self-exploration manifests itself. Presently, I will study how the journeys the protagonists make help them reassert their independence and achieve inner balance.

2.4 “A Merry Widow”: short summary

In “A Merry Widow” (1989), the protagonist Elsa Palmer does not cancel her two-week holiday after the death of her husband Philip. She goes on her trip to Dorset, where she is alone and happy. She escapes from the mistreatments of her husband, his constant irritation and derogatory witticisms, the selfishness and indifference from her children and grandchildren. Over her holiday in Dorset, Elsa spends her time in a small paddock enlaced to her rented cottage, which she calls her “kingdom”. She is appalled when an old man begins reaping away the high grass, leaving her kingdom bare and empty. However, soon Elsa comes to understand that the old man with his scythe is not Death, but “Father Time”, who reaps the grass, but only “for the summer”. Elsa becomes aware of the fact that her husband Philip died because he “had failed to recognize

his adversary”, whereas she herself has “conversed with and been spared by the Grim Reaper” (p.168).

2.5 Function of the journey

Now, let us discuss how this short story employs the element of the journey to signify the restatement of independence. Elsa’s journey, which has not been cancelled contrary to the expectations of her friends and family, is the affirmation of her independence, her rights and her self. It can be viewed as a make-up for the years of abuse she endured from her husband. One can see that the protagonist’s disillusionment with her married life has turned into an open criticism of this social institution. Elsa admits that marriage has “warped” her, and that it is unnatural in terms of limiting one’s freedom (p.155).

Elsa’s journey has got the function of restoring balance in her life. In Dorset Elsa is alone, watching birds and collecting flower samples, reading and sleeping whenever she wishes. She is alone, she is not bossed around and not dominated by her husband. She reestablishes her freedom from her husband and her family in that she embarks on a journey on her own. It is during her journey that she acknowledges the powers of Time, whom she sees embodied in the old man reaping the summer’s grass. Elsa reaches the conclusion that Time spares those who do not fail to recognize him. Having accepted his superiority, as she believes she has done, she was “spared”.

3.1 “Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale”: short summary

Another short story which presents the journey as a means of regaining a woman’s independence is “Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale” (2000), Drabble’s latest story in the collection, which tells of a high school literature teacher, Mary Mogg. This is the only story in the collection narrated in the first person. Approaching her retirement, Mary Mogg returns to Shurton Bars, the place where she has spent a “summer of intense emotions” when she was twenty. The place is doubly important for her, since it has the spirit of Wordsworth, whom she greatly admires. Having been helped by Anne, a natural scientist, as she twisted her ankle in the woods, Mary is invited to Kellynch Hall where she is introduced to interesting scientists from different countries. Her vacation comes to its end and she returns home to Yorkshire, feeling that she has brought “some magic with [her]” which will sustain her through the winter (p. 227).

3.2 Symbolism and the function of journey

In many ways, the present short story can be viewed as a culmination of the previous ones in that it offers a prospective of the approaching retirement. In the context of other, chronologically earlier stories in the collection, the story can be interpreted as a possible view on the end of the English woman's career life. Mary Mogg decides for a "half-term midsummer treat", a two-week vacation in the countryside in the mid of her teaching term. She becomes tired after years of teaching English Literature, and making her students appreciate English literature and, in particular, Wordsworth (p. 207). But most importantly, Mary is a woman of pre-retirement age who is afraid of the approaching old age and forced idleness, which is likely to bring back the depression she experienced forty years ago. To "test her destiny", and to re-remember the events of that memorable summer, Mary decides to "step westward".

The symbolism of westward appears repeatedly in the short story's diegesis. The protagonist treats "westward" as something important, and addresses it with caution: "I did not step westward" (p. 209), "I made my way westward" (p. 212). She also calls it "a magic land" (p. 210) and "the faraway world" (p. 208). These metaphors show how significant the area, and the idea of treading it, is to the protagonist. Westward is more than just a geographical location, but metaphorically, the old scar within herself which she has until now been afraid to touch. This scar is the Dorset summer almost forty years ago, when her love to a fellow tourist was not mutual and he preferred another girl. Mary says that she has lived this summer through in her memory many times (p.208). By the time she returns to Dorset as a middle-aged woman, she is not yet free of those memories, and something has to happen before she lets go of them. This event is her meeting Anne Elliot, an energetic woman "with a wild gleam in her eyes at sixty", is an encouraging example of the lifestyle a retired woman may lead. With the help of Anne, but also thanks to her brave return to the place which caused her a year of depression decades earlier, Mary gets rid of her fears for solitude and inactivity (p.218). Upon her return to work, Mary admits that her excursion seems like a dream, but she feels she has changed and has become "fortified" (p.226).

Mary's journey of asserting her independence, revealed in her fearless confrontation with her own painful past, does have the explicit features of *bildungsroman* suggested by Gullette. It accentuates the fact that the private transformation of the self can occur at any point in life and is

part of the extended, continuous process. Mary has transformed her past by way of admitting it and reconciliation with it. This proves my point that the bildungsroman features in Drabble are relevant not only in her novels but also in her longer fiction.

3.3 Narrative style

The narrative style in “Stepping Westward” is peculiar and differs significantly from the previous stories in the collection. One can easily detect the author engaging the reader into a dialogue (“You must not imagine me as speaking to you in my own person. I speak to you as Mary Mogg ...”, p.207), metalinguistic remarks (“it is a hobbyhorse of mine”, “I apologize for this polemic digression”, p.210), intertextuality (“I too have crossed the Alps”, p.208), comments of her own linguistic style (“is the word *marge* an example of poetic diction, I wonder?”, p.217), self-depreciation (“yes, I do have *some* friends”, p.216). This contributes to a smaller distance between the narrator and the reader and makes the account of the short story more intimate.

The reader is always reminded of the protagonist’s occupation. Her allusions to Wordsworth and Coleridge, complaints about her students and the national curriculum are smoothly embedded in the account of her journey narrative. Ironies and especially sarcasms are frequent, too, and are used by the protagonists to gently mock themselves. Drabble vividly employs sarcasm, as she goes to explain what happened during that summer forty years ago:

Perhaps you are waiting for me to say that I became pregnant that summer, and lost the baby, or had it aborted [...] No, it was not so [...] I had no right to cry, ‘Oh misery! Oh misery!’ This is a plain tale. The moving accident is not my trade.

Drabble, p. 217

As it is not infrequent in Drabble’s short stories, important questions of rethinking one’s life usually unfold against the background of such routine actions as taking a walk or a trip by train. Gullette claims that this exactly underlies Drabble’s development as a novelist, for she is asking “the philosophical questions embedded in the simple fable, and showing how the answers change as we grow up and grow older” (1983:287). Finally, the story features the earlier mentioned theme of completing the circle. By suddenly breaking from the routine of her teaching life, the protagonist embarks on a journey to the past, both geographically and metaphorically. She re-experiences the events of the memorable summer and achieves balance through the return to the past.

Theme II. Journey as an Evasion from Marital Hardships and Family Obligations in “The Gifts of War” and “Crossing the Alps”

4.2 Theme overview

Presently, I am going to discuss how Drabble’s protagonists use their journeys as instruments of breaking free from marital problems and obligations.

The sphere of family relationships in Drabble’s longer fiction has been studied by Gullette and Jane Campell. Gullette observes that in Drabble’s novels, childhood miseries are inevitably bound to recede with time, whereas the marital, self-created ones, go for a long time and blur into eternal imprisonment (1983:293). This point-of-view becomes substantiated in “The Gifts of War” and “Crossing the Alps”, in which marriage obligations are portrayed as infinitely protracted. Campell sees no gender delineation in the impact of marital problems on Drabble’s characters. As she suggests, in Drabble’s short fiction, both women and men become aware of the importance of knowing their selves whereas marriage can be a trap for either sex (1983:42).

4.3 “The Gifts of War”: short summary

Written in 1970, the story consists of two parts narrated by two different protagonists. The first part is delivered through the eyes of an unhappily married young woman, who is walking to town to buy a longed-for toy for her son’s birthday. The second part is narrated by the seventeen-year-old Frances, who is about to start her university studies in another city, but for now is helping her friend Michael with his antiwar demonstrations. The reader finds out that the unnamed mother has been saving the money (in secret from her alcoholic husband) to buy a luxuriant but unpractical toy for her son Kevin. During her walk to the town toy store, she remembers herself as a young girl having fancies about getting married. Next follows the part delivered by the young and burden-free Frances Janet Ashton Hall, who organizes a one-person street demonstration to stop the war in Vietnam, to please Michael. The short story’s crucial point occurs in the toy store, where the protagonists meet. The events in the store are focalized through Frances. At the shop, when the unnamed mother is about to buy a specific toy, a “Desperado Destruction Machine”, she is being strongly advised against this by Frances, who helps Michael persuade the store owner to stop selling military toys. Overwhelmed by this pressure, the woman finds it hard to bear and starts screaming obscenities, after which she bursts

into tears and leaves the shop. Frances begins to understand that she and Michael “had done something dreadful to her, in the light of which those long-since ended raids and even distant Vietnam itself were an irrelevance, a triviality” (p. 100).

4.4 Earlier research

In “Becoming Terrestrial: The Short Stories of Margaret Drabble”, Jane Campell stresses the short story’s delineation of the experiences of two women, each of different social standing, about which the reader finds out through dual narrative perspectives and “a detached, judging narrator” (1983:38). The article author discusses the effects of war on both protagonists, stressing that the younger one retains an opportunity to flee from them, whereas the older one seems to be bound to them as long as she lives. Interestingly, Campell believes that the short story highlights “the two twentieth-century wars”, sexual and class war. The sexual war is conspicuous in the fact that both protagonists, the unnamed mother trying to purchase a Desperado Destruction Machine, and Frances, advising her against this in line with Michael’s antiwar policy, are both ruled by the desire to please a male (1983:39). Campell concludes that the clash between the world of the mother and their own ideology lies in the one between “rigid dogmatism and the vulnerability of the real life human being” (1983:39). The researcher stresses that Frances begins to realize that “the sweeping vistas of abstract realism” are blinding to the immediate needs of an individual (1983:42). Finally, Campell holds that in her fiction, Drabble shows sensitivity to the limitations women impose on their lives by the evasions they adopt in order to make the routine of their lives run smoothly, and how anger can be “a necessary release for a woman who has repressed her resentment” (1983:43).

4.5 The handling of names

Due to its narrative structure, “The Gifts of War” is by far the most technically complicated short story by Margaret Drabble. Another factor contributing to such a complexity is the author’s handling of the protagonists’ names. Although the story has got two protagonists, one of them, in my view, is more central to the story. The more “central” protagonist is the unnamed mother. Here it is impossible not to notice the following paradigm: the lack of name of the main protagonist contrasted to the long name of the supporting one, Frances Janet Ashton Hall. The reason of this proceeds from the short story’s context and lies in the obvious differences in the

two characters' social standing. The story's omniscient narrator (whose voice is consonant with the one of the author) informs that Frances Janet Ashton Hall is younger, was born "into a different class of society" and, most importantly, "was not sentenced to it [her class] for life" (p. 94). Frances is getting ready to go to "a southern University" to pursue a degree in economics. It is exactly the observation that Frances is not trapped in her class for life which points at the fact that the other protagonist is, and lays the cornerstone of their opposition. The other differences between the protagonists include the difference of their age and the time when they were born. Frances, being a post-war child, caught the sad imprints of the war, but "was not yet old enough to speculate upon the effect that this [vision] had had upon the development of her sensibility" (p. 94). Again, the information which is rather generously disclosed as being absent in Frances, tells exactly what the other protagonist has, and sheds light on the latter's personality. The third striking difference between the two characters is their responsibilities. Frances is a school graduate who, sharing romantic visions of pacifism, helps her friend advocate against the war in Vietnam. The main protagonist, on the other hand, is trapped in her loveless marriage, but is redeemed by the love to her son.

The above-mentioned testifies to the fact that the protagonists are unnamed when they experience a deep inner conflict, caused by the circumstances of their marriage, to which there is no evident solution. Another observation is that the unnamed protagonists do not break free from the vicious circles of their inner problems the way the named protagonists in other short stories in the collection¹ do.

4.6 Function of the journey

The unnamed protagonist's journey - her walk to the town - is the move out of the vicious circle of daily marriage tortures and toward the assertion of her freedom and the peculiar proof of love to her son. In the context of this short story, freedom is viewed through the opportunity to buy an unnecessary toy, in spite of her poverty. The protagonist's buying the toy for her son, as well as the journey to the town on which she embarks on her own, is not only an assertion of her freedom, but also some sort of apology for her loveless marriage. Unfortunately, when the toy

¹ The protagonists which manage to resolve their inner conflicts appear in the short stories "A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman", "The Merry Widow", "The Caves of God".

drops on the floor and breaks down, the protagonist's dream is shattered both literally and figuratively.

The story's title poses at least two questions: which "gifts" and which "war" are implied? The war may have both literal and metaphorical implications. In the first case, it is without any doubt the war in Vietnam, against which Frances's boyfriend so drastically opposes. Figuratively, however, by war the author might mean the daily tortures of living with an abusive husband, or the war the protagonist wages with herself for being so naïve and immature when choosing a husband. If one contemplates on the meaning of gifts which this war brings, one can think of the elder protagonist's beloved son, or either the redemption which is granted to her by this love:

[...] her life, which seemed after that bridal day [...] to sink deeply and almost instantly into a mire of penury and beer and butchery, had been so redeemed for her by her child that she could afford to smile with a kind of superior wisdom [...]

Drabble, p.92

The author supplies more metaphors as she goes on to explain the complex nature of the protagonist's attitude to her son and husband: "She loved [her son] with so much passion that a little of it *spilled over* generously onto the man that has misused her" (p. 86, emphasis mine). The short story features a love-hate paradigm: love to a child and hate to a husband, both equally strong. Through the love for her son, the protagonist accepts her lot to endure the maltreatment from her husband. She begins to think that the attacks and bruises from her husband might be as innocuous as her son's criticisms of her cooking (p.86). Moreover, she transfers the threats of the relationship with her husband to the relationship with her son. Such a transfer leads to a pronounced change in her behavioral pattern toward the son. She tries not to manifest her love for Kevin and often pretends to scold him, since, as she believes, the hostilities are "a better cover for love" (p. 88).

5.1 "Crossing the Alps": short summary

Written in 1971, the short story tells of a two-week getaway of two lovers, each having their own families. Daniel, the protagonist, is sorry once he becomes ill and unfit before a thoroughly-planned journey with his lover. His unnamed lover is suppressed by her multiple obligations, the hardest of them being the daily care of the sick child. In spite of Daniel's sickness, the lovers do not cancel the trip and decide to drive to Yugoslavia. During the trip Daniel starts feeling worse,

and the woman suggests to drive the car herself. Dozing off intermittently and being unable to control the journey, he begins to notice how the woman's behavior has changed once she has assumed full responsibility for the trip. When they finally arrive to the hotel, Daniel, dizzy and weak from his fever, tells his lover that their relationship is not working out. The woman replies that they had never been given a chance to try and be happy, and mentions that even the lucky opportunity of being able to get away on the trip is spoilt. He becomes emphatic of his lover's hardships, and takes them as his own, and feels them both being part of the same thing. Years after, he remembers this time in the Alps as a revelation of comfort and balance.

5.2 Earlier research

Jane Campell maintains that this short story "uses plot in order to hold out superficially alluring possibilities which are quietly rejected" (1983:31). The article author stresses the impossibility of the lovers' achieving a perfect balance in their relationship, as well as the fact that they will never destroy each other. Campell contemplates on Daniel's vision of the tragedy and love which go shoulder-to-shoulder in the relationship with his unnamed lover (1983:31).

Relevant to the present analysis is how the journey motifs were studied in the framework of Black women's autobiographical narratives. Mary G. Mason studies the works of such Black American women writers as Nancy Prince, Susie King Taylor, Ida B. Wells and others (in "Travel as Metaphor and Reality in Afro-American Women's Autobiography, 1850-1972). Mason holds that for the Black women, independent journey experiences are a means of asserting their identity in the patriarchal white world and views them as a commitment to action and as a route to self-discovery (1990:341).

5.3 The function of journey

The meaning of the journey to the Alps is greater in the female protagonist than in her partner. For her, it is more than a blissful getaway and an occasion to be together unnoticed, but also breaking free from her multiple obligations as a mother of a sick child, a breadwinner, and a daughter. During the journey, the protagonist rearticulates her strength and independence, when she by chance becomes responsible for the whole trip to Yugoslavia. In this way, the crossing of the Alps is exactly the symbol of this asserted strength, as well as the transition in the lovers' relationship. Daniel's illness puts her in the position of a decisive and responsible mother, the role she is only too well accustomed to, and makes her partner think that she does like "a

situation of sorrow”, and is most comfortable in it (p.78). The unnamed protagonist admits the “sense of achievement” she feels at finally having made him “so helpless at once” (p.79). This testifies to the crucial need of taking care of someone which transfers from the domain of mother-child relationship toward the relationship between a man and a woman. Remarkably enough, in this case the maternal instinct at the same time becomes the statement of freedom and some sort of rescue device which protects the heroine from further blows.

For Daniel, the story’s narrator, the outcome of their journey is an acquired understanding of the unity of their common sorrow, a connection which remains even when the love relationship fails. The culmination of the journey and of the story is a “revelation of comfort”:

[...] years after, he had only to think of pine trees and Alpine landscapes to be reminded of something half realized, a revelation of comfort too dim to articulate, a revelation that had lost its words [...] and its meaning, but not its images. He thought of pine trees, and he thought of her, and the memory [...] sustained him

Drabble, p. 84

Mason’s view of a woman’s journey as a way of committing herself to action and paving the way for self-discovery finds relevant application in the analysis of the journey functions in the short story above. In “Crossing the Alps”, the woman leaves her domestic problems aside, and goes on what has to be a romantic getaway. She thus commits herself to her rights as a woman, which she has been suppressing when she let her commitments as mother and daughter take over. Importantly, following her commitment is her self-discovery. This self-discovery manifests itself in the woman’s understanding of the reasons of the futility of her relationship with Daniel. To sum up, the geographical crossing of the Alps also marks the crossing of another border, the psychological one, which marks the transition into a new, “humane”, plane of the woman-man relationship.

Theme III. Journey and Ascent as Achievements of Victory in “A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman” and “A Pyrrhic Victory”

Yet another function of the journey which appears in the collection is victory. Below follows the analysis of the two stories in which the female protagonists achieve what they think

is victory exactly during their journey or ascent up the hill. Each of the protagonists think they have won over something, but whether it is so is for Drabble's reader to judge.

6.2 "A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman": short summary

The story, written in 1973 tells the reader about Jenny Jamieson, a famous and successful TV presenter, a wife and a mother of three. Jenny has an outburst of anger after being mentally abused by her husband, and after that she becomes "a different woman". The next day she for the first time becomes aware of the cynicism of her work colleagues, the futility of her TV show, the limitations of the people she meets. She begins to understand that "some little mechanism in [her] has broken" (p.123), for she no longer seems to be able to smile and ignore the shortcomings of the system of nepotism which she believes rules the system at work. Having been diagnosed with a gynaecological tumor and in need of operation, Jenny starts thinking she will die. During the train journey from the hospital and to the official reception at a comprehensive school, Jenny contemplates on whether her children would remember her after her death. She rethinks her attitude to God and blames him for his "weakness". For the twenty minutes of delivering a speech at school, Jenny bleeds profusely from the earlier examination. In the meanwhile, she understands that she will not die because in her mind she has already faced what she feared most in death – the inability to fulfill her obligations to her children. The story's end implicitly suggests that Jenny has not died.

6.3 Earlier research

Jane Campell writes that that day in Jenny's life has permanently changed her nature. Her awareness of the hypocrisy of her co-workers and the futility of her work, testifies to her inner growth and the fact that she starts evaluating her world more realistically (1983:42). The article author holds that "this story of Superwoman may be helpful to the schoolgirls, but the truth, as represented by the strain and grief of Jenny's life that day, is much less glamorous" (1983:34). Campell concludes that, through this story, Drabble shows that both "the old romantic myths of dependence and the new ones of success and independence for women" have to be reconsidered (1983:34).

6.4 Function of the journey

In the context of the present short story, the victory the protagonist achieves is at the same time her salvation. Salvation is the function of Jenny's trip, and it is achieved through the

acknowledgement of her fears. Jenny's diagnosis and the subsequent need for operation bring her into thinking about death. During her trip by train, Jenny criticizes God for being "weak" in that he is unable to keep her alive:

But it did strike her now [...] that her own premature and sudden death would disprove the existence of God entirely [...] How could a God exist who would be so careless of his contracts as to allow her to die and break her own contracts to her children?

Drabble, p. 131

Importantly, together with Jenny's disillusionment with God, she becomes able to locate her fears. Jennie understands that what she dreads most is not being able to care for her children (p. 133). Nevertheless, during her speech at school, Jenny comes to think that her love for her children would not be subdued even by the death, and her love has "released from the existence" (p. 139). As she later admits, that moment of recognition meant that she should not die, for she had accepted death. Jenny finally admits that that day had been "both a joke and a victory, but at whose expense, and over whom, she could not have said" (p. 140).

In the line of my analysis, the victory the protagonist achieves lies in the awareness of the fact that the transiency of life can be countered by the strength of love which is timeless and unbound by circumstances. This supports Campell's view that such a thinking pattern testifies to the fact that Jenny has moved from a mechanical image of death to an organic one, which "involves a more hopeful view of the individual's relation to time" (1983:41).

But it is not only fears that Jenny's newly-acquired victory and salvation unburden her from. Jenny casts away that little knob which for years was helping her cope with the limitations of her colleagues and the rigidity and conservatism of the decision-making system at work. Jenny's decision not to "let anyone inside [her] anymore" after the examination at the gynaecologist's, together with such allusions as the number of meals she has "politely cooked" and the times when she "politely opened [her] legs" (p.138) testify to her denial of the "weak female" position in her marriage. At the same time, these changes supply proof to the fact that Margaret Drabble's subtle feminism is conspicuous in her short fiction, too.

7.1 "A Pyrrhic Victory": short summary

The story is written in 1968. Young hikers from England are climbing a hill in Elba, Italy. The protagonist, seventeen-year-old Anne, is very tired and longing for a break and lunch.

However, the other hikers do not seem to mind the tough ascend, and Anne chooses to keep her complaints to herself. On the way uphill, Anne contemplates the differences between her and the rest of the company. She describes them as cynical and viewing the world from the negative side. Having reached the hilltop, Anne feels grateful to herself that she has not complained aloud. After some time, the American friend Johnny offers to have lunch, and Anne admits that she had long been hungry. They reproach her for not having said that before. After the lunch, Johnny asks how the empty sardine tin should be disposed. Anne takes it in her hands and throws it into a small pool of water, created by the sea. Everyone seems to mind; however, they keep silent. The protagonist regards this as her victory: through this act she believes to have conquered her childishness and naivety.

7.2 Earlier research

Campell accentuates the fact that Anne deliberately destroys the beauty of the Mediterranean landscape with her foolish act, which she considers victorious. She feels an outsider in the group, and does not disclose her admiration for the landscape because she does not want to be considered naïve by her seemingly serious friends. Since her friends do not condemn her, she regards herself as having arrived at the authenticity she has strived for (1983:30), and feels emotionally satisfied. Campell claims that through the act of throwing an empty tin can in the pool of water, she destroys not only the beauty of the landscape, but also the acquiescent aspect of herself. Anne's final feeling is of having denied her need of "sharing and articulating and definition" (1983:30). Nevertheless, the article author admits that Anne's ludicrous victory, which is satirically called Napoleonic, still testifies to her growing and learning.

It is important to mention how ascent has been studied in earlier research. Ascension has an important role in the narratives of the Tewa, the indigenous North American peoples, as studied by Sandra Prewitt Edelman (1974). Although the Tewa believe that after death they will return to Mother Earth, the ascension motifs frequently appear in their mythology in forms of steps, birds, prayer-feathers, clouds, mountain-top lakes and hills (1974:36). In the Tewa narratives, ascension has the symbolic forms of achievement of knowledge or skill, rescue, alteration of existential state and regeneration. Edelman mentions that in the Tewa tales, the achievement of good is realized not only by means of ascent, but only after a subsequent decent back to the

ground, and the good is actualized only after the descent follows (1974:38). According to the author, this reverses a more conventional plot with a “descent-ascent” pattern, in which the protagonist firstly descends in some situation of conflict, to rise from it and reach the state of balance and well-being (1974:39).

7.3 Function of the ascent

The story’s protagonist is a rebelling pacifier. She is used to suppressing her own wishes and needs. Not willing to either go to Elba or ascend the hill, she never mentioned her reluctance since the majority obeyed Johnny. Anne rebels against everything her friends do or say, but she follows them obediently and keeps silent. Her ascent up the hill is the metaphorical exploration of her alienation to the rest of the company. Anne feels different and opposed from Johnny, an ambitious American, her boyfriend Charles, a “London child” with his parents probably “expensively and stylishly divorced” (p.57). The protagonist admits that she cannot say a word “without feeling herself quite foolishly exposed” (p.57). Once on the hilltop, Anne is enthralled by the beauty of the landscape. She wants to share this excitement with the rest of the group, but she decides against this to avoid looking ridiculous. Anne believes to have made up for both her childishness and her complaisance when she suddenly throws the sardine can into the pool of water:

And what she was conscious of, as she sat there calmly smiling, was victory: like Napoleon she had conquered in that action continents, she had conquered Europe, this tideless foreign sea, she had conquered America, all those railroads and all that Bourbon, she had conquered England and that child in cotton frock

Drabble, p. 60

The metonymies Anne employs in her account of her victory show that to her, it means the liberation from her genuine admiration for the landscape which she thinks is naïve and childish. She calls it the “gaudy picture postcard set”, which she strives to eliminate in herself as something weak and disgraceful. It is only too evident that Anne’s view of the open admiration of beauty as a sign of weakness and childishness has been picked up from her friends, whom she hates but looks up to. Drabble sarcastically depicts this victory, comparing Anna’s reckless act to Napoleon’s conquests. What to Anne symbolizes independence from her friends and serves as a make-up for the lack of will she showed during the ascent up the hill, is presented by the author as a foolish and pointless achievement.

It is worth mentioning that the short story's plot goes in line with what Edelman calls the conventional pattern in which the situation of conflict is followed by ascent. This substantiates her idea that ascent, viewed in the context of the Tewa narratives, with its value realized only through a successive descent, reverses the traditional preconceptions of the descent-ascent structure of the protagonist's conflict resolution.

One could analyze the short story's title. The idiom of the Pyrrhic victory suggests a precarious victory, in which casualties are too big to outweigh the victory itself; a victory, if ever repeated again, will lead to imminent destruction. According to the present definition, one could reason that the destruction, if brought about by another Pyrrhic victory, can mean the girl's self-denial or self-erasure. This self-erasure can be the result of the protagonist's too laborious attempts of eradicating all the "childish" and "naïve" things in her personality, in aspirations to achieve the seriousness and authenticity which, she reckons, pertain to the adults.

The two stories, analyzed in the present theme, employ the elements of victory. In both stories, the implications of victory are metaphorical, but the "achievement" in "A Pyrrhic Victory" is pronouncedly more precarious. What is interesting though are the differences between the protagonists' attitudes to their victories. Jenny feels that she has won over something weak inside her, but she also admits that she does not know what it was. Anne, on the other hand, seems to know that it was her childishness that she managed to overcome, and this astounding victory has brought her closer to the seriousness and adulthood her friends arguably possess. Thus, one can see the interplay between the rational basis of the protagonists' victories and their own evaluations of it: the essence of a more "understandable" victory over the fears of death is not perceived by Jenny, whereas a trivial act receives extra attention and is even glorified by Anne. Such interplays testify to the presence of multiple, often overlapping angles employed by Drabble as she presents similar phenomena under conspicuously contrasting lights. This will be analyzed in Chapter 3 of the present essay.

Theme IV. Journey as an escape from loneliness and routine in the short story “A Voyage to Cythera”

8.1 Short summary

“A Voyage to Cythera” (1967), tells the story of Helen, a young unmarried woman, who is very fond of traveling. She considers herself “a hardened case” since she stubbornly believes in the romantic possibilities of travel, and in the displacement of the body which comes after the displacement of the soul (p.23). During one of her trips by train, Helen witnesses the immense confusion and restlessness of a man sitting in her compartment. She presumes he is tortured by love. The man asks Helen to write the address of a Mrs Smithson and post his letter to her. Helen agrees. Long after that encounter, Helen cannot stop thinking about the man and Mrs Smithson. At a Christmas party, it occurs to Helen that she can go and find Mrs Smithson, since she remembers her address by heart. She finds the place and stares through the window of Mrs Smithson’s house, at the two women laying the table and the four children playing around them. Helen cannot put her eyes off them. When she sees one of the children drawing the curtains of the window she has been staring through, Helen starts walking away. Just at that moment she sees a car pull over, and sitting in the driver’s seat is the man from the train. Surprised by such an unexpected meeting, the man says: “I don’t know what to say to you, you look so fragile that a word might hurt you” (p.40). Dazed and astonished, Helen replies nothing and leaves for home.

8.2 Earlier research

Jane Campell claims that the short story “turns away from the possible romantic resolution” and “foregrounds the moment which the protagonist’s rational self knows may be misleading” (1983:29). Reflecting on the story’s title, the article author informs of the counter-story presented to the reader, in which “the fairy-tale love plot of rescue and escape is hinted at and rejected” (1983:34). “A Voyage to Cythera”, according to Campell, shows Drabble’s view that the imagination can seduce by its insistence on symbolic patterning, since Helen is aware of the fact that her belief in accidental romance inhibits her way to growth and maturity (1983:37). Campell holds that Helen’s masochistic act of staring at Mrs Smithson’s house is rooted in the real need of seeing her romantic dreams come true, at least in someone else.

The short story was analyzed in comparison with Henry James’ “In the Cage” (James W. Mayer, 2002). Present in both works are, according to Mayer, “parallels of theme, characters,

action, and method” (2002:57). The author discusses the role of “dramatized illumination” the protagonists experience at the end of the story, which is however more emphatic and conspicuous in “A Voyage to Cythera”. Mayer informs that the similarities in the two protagonists’ desire to enter a world of beauty, passion and light, testify to the central interests of both James and Drabble (2002:60).

Additionally, the journey motifs were studied in children’s literature as well. In her analysis of Janet Lunn’s *The Root Cellar*, Barbara Carman Garner notes that the protagonists’ journeys cause their displacements in time, at the same time achieving moral, spiritual and intellectual growth (1986:73). The protagonists’ journey in time is viewed by the article author as an escape from loneliness, alienation “towards belonging, friendship and happiness” (1986:73).

8.3 Symbolism of the title

In the ancient Greek mythology, Cythera is the island of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Interestingly, the immediate connection of the short story’s title is a poem by Charles Baudelaire, which appears in the collection *Flowers of Evil* (first edition 1857). In the poem, the narrator’s encounter with Cythera is a dreadful sight of the corpse of a hung man eaten by the vultures, which is contrasted to the island’s traditional idyllic images. The narrator identifies his own sufferings of self-loathing with the body of the hung man.

However, when one starts contemplating the implications of the short story’s title without reference to Baudelaire’s poem, but only in the context of Drabble’s short story, it becomes clear that some journey to love is suggested. There are several possible explanations of the kind of love which is implied, and between whom does it occur. First, this is Helen’s love of travelling, a craving for expectation and anticipation. This anticipation includes the hope of falling in love. The second explanation of this sort of love is more abstract, and it underlies Helen’s longing for the country of romance, mystery and intimacy, away from the routine and loneliness in her life. It is exactly this country of romance which is the metaphorical Cythera where Helen travels. Finally, the story’s title could also pertain to the man in the story, if to consider that his train trip is a journey toward (re)union with his lover, and in this way his entrance into Cythera.

8.4 Function of the journey

It is clear that Helen's decision to find Mrs Smithson is an attempt to enter "the country of passion" as she calls it at least as an observer, even if she herself is not part of it. Standing out in the cold and observing the idyllic picture inside the house, Helen catches a glimpse of the other family's happiness, and, by standing and staring, she metaphorically steals a piece of it. This piece of stolen happiness is all Helen can get, before the doors of the prospective chance for intimacy and opportunity are literally shut in front of her:

She turned away, as the child [...] began to struggle with the heavy floor-length hangings, shutting inch by inch away from her the colored angles of refracted light, the Christmas tree, the airy fishes, the verdant green, the small angelic innocent faces, the shining spheres of glass [...]

Drabble, p.40

The abundance of light and warmth in the house is contrasted to the darkness and loneliness of Helen's own apartment. It is exactly through the detailed account of the view which she is about to lose that the volume of everything that is missing in her life becomes clear. All these symbols of domesticity - colors of refracted light, the Christmas tree, the fish, the angelic faces - embody her need for intimacy, warmth and company which have become almost physical.

Due to the circumstances of her life as an independent woman, who is lonely and striving for romantic fulfillment, Helen's expectations of a journey as a means of fighting the routine and loneliness of her life become understandable. She admits that her journeys are meant to "call her [...] from the endurable sorrows of daily existence to some possible other country of existence" (p.35). This possible country of existence is the Cythera she longs for. Through what Helen tells about the lives of her friends it becomes evident what she herself lacks - personal happiness, adventures, or a life abroad:

Yves was seen in Marseilles carrying a lobster, Esther was seen in a bookshop in New York wearing a fur coat and with diamonds in her hair, Esther was in Marrakesh, living in one room with an Arab, Yves had gone to Ireland and started a lobster farm

Drabble, p.36.

Gullette, analyzing the issues of progress and transformation in Drabble's longer fiction, mentions the role of voyages made by the protagonist of *Jerusalem the Golden* (1967): "She has taken literal voyages – to London and beyond, to Paris – these destinations symbolizing to Drabble [...] a rich, playful, interesting and more freely chosen life" (2003:289). This evaluation

of the journey's function is consonant to the line of my analysis in "A Voyage to Cythera" and supports the idea of setting off for a journey with the aim of actively choosing one's life.

Undoubtedly, Helen's journey to the house of Mrs Smithson is a journey to the Cythera of her dreams. Helen does enter the country of love and intimacy and happiness; however, not as an active participant, but as an outside observer. Nevertheless, she admits that she has drawn faith from the other people's happiness which will sustain her, even if she herself is not able to experience it (p. 39). Remarkably, the same idea, though in the novel *The Realms of God*, appears in Drabble's fiction. The protagonist in *The Realms of God* says that "even the idea of joy may carry one through" (cited in Gullette, 2003).

Thus, in the present chapter I have analyzed how journeys and ascents are employed to show the important shifts in the protagonists' understanding of their selves, their positions in their families, in the achievements of victory, authenticity and reassertions of independence. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the narrative dynamics is revealed in the fact that the characters' psychological developments unfold simultaneously with their geographic movements. This makes it possible to analyze the relationship between the psychological and geographical spheres, which will be done in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Psychological Insights into the Journeys

In this chapter, I will view the short stories of my choice from the position of a more general and comparative analysis. The chapter is divided into two parts, each dealing with a specific feature of the short stories viewed in their totality. Section 3.2 studies the structure of the protagonists' psychological movements which occur simultaneously with their geographical ones. The analysis is based on the categories of abyss, plateau and ascent which refer to the protagonists' psychological states during the different stages of the stories' diegesis. In section 3.3, I approach the short stories from the angles of the multiple viewpoints which present one and the same social circumstance (like an unhappy marriage or a divorce) under so different lights that it becomes absolutely necessary to research the authorial intentions of doing so. In the same section, I discuss the parallels which appear throughout the short stories.

3.2 "Abyss", "plateau" and "ascent" as stages in the psychological journeys

As acknowledged in Theme I, traveling has earlier been studied as an instrument of defining the women's discovery of the self. What has not been studied before, however, is the connection between the geographical and psychological journeys and the interplay between its separate elements. The latter is what I intend to do in the present section. I will study the structural elements of the protagonists' exploration of their selves as applied to their standings in the family, among friends or co-workers. I introduce the three structural elements of abyss, plateau and ascent², which refer to the stages of their psychological explorations occurring during the geographical journeys and ascents. Used in their metaphorical meanings, these elements signify the spiritual and psychological movements and do not necessarily coincide with the protagonists' geographical movements. An "abyss" implies the lowest point in the protagonist's self-esteem brought about by the circumstances of her relationships with the family and friends. It should be noted that the structural element of abyss does not have its counterpart in the geographical sphere, unlike plateau and ascent. "Plateau" denotes the stabilization, a gradual, but not drastic

² The idea of introducing this structural pattern was inspired by *A Woman of Substance* by Barbara Taylor Bradford with sections entitled as follows: Abyss, Plateau, Ascent, Pinnacle. These titles vividly refer to the corresponding periods of the protagonist's life.

improvement of the protagonist's condition. Finally, "ascent" is the psychological upheaval, which occurs in the result of re-asserted independence, an achievement of victory. Now let us study how each of the defined structural elements are employed in the short stories of my choice.

3.2.1 The 1960s

The journeys of the earliest decade, the 1960s, all start with abysses which trigger the protagonists' geographical movements to plateaus and ascents which bring them to various achievements. The psychological journeys of Helen in "A Voyage to Cythera", Anne in "A Pyrrhic Victory" and Daniel in "Crossing the Alps" are caused by their movements out of the abysses of loneliness, the supposed naivety and childishness, and the lack of development in a love relationship, correspondingly. The critical point triggering Helen's movement from abyss and onto the plateau takes place at the party, when her loneliness aggravates and she decides to go to Mrs Smith's house. For Anne, this is the point when the hikers finally reach the hilltop and can have rest and eat lunch. In Daniel's case, this is the outside reason, his illness, which makes him sleep all the time and deprives him of all control for the journey.

In "A Voyage to Cythera" and "Crossing the Alps", the psychological plateaus unfold during the geographical movement. On her way to Mrs Smith's house, Helen comes to understand that her assuredness in the existence of some country of passion is not that innocuous after all, for, out of loneliness but not curiosity alone, is she walking to an unknown person's house in piercing cold. On the other hand, Daniel, in his state of painful apathy and almost unconscious driven all the way to Yugoslavia, begins to notice the change in his lover's behavior, brought about by her being solely responsible for the trip. However, what is interesting, is that in "A Pyrrhic Victory", the plateau of Anne's psychological state coincides with the peak of her geographical ascent. It is only on the hilltop, where Anne finally takes a rest and eats lunch, that she becomes able to see the beauty of the Italian landscape and her irritation with her friends and her forced complaisance subsides. This observation suggests the existence of some interesting patterns in the interplay between the protagonists' spiritual and geographical movements. Not only may they coincide or not coincide in the domain of "the spiritual versus the geographical", but also subvert the obvious assumptions about the correspondence between structural elements from the geographical and the spiritual spheres.

As studied in Chapter 2, the protagonists' ascents come in different forms. One manages to "draw faith from the passionate vision of intimacy" (p. 39), although this intimacy has never been granted to herself ("A Voyage to Cythera"). The second achieves a victory over the seemingly childish and inexperienced part of herself and arrives at what she thinks is authenticity ("A Pyrrhic Victory"). The third reaches the stage which surpasses the sphere of a woman-man relationship and offers a perspective on the unity of human suffering ("Crossing the Alps"). However, what is most important, is that the elements of abyss, plateau and ascent follow in the same sequence throughout the selected stories of the first decade.

3.2.2 The 1970s

Unlike the stories of the 1960s, the protagonists' psychological explorations in the stories of the 1970s do not follow the abyss-plateau-ascent pattern. "The Gifts of War" starts with an ascent and "A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman" starts with a plateau. Directly in the former story's beginning, the reader finds out about the protagonist's emotional upheaval: "When she woke in the morning, she could tell at once [...] that she had some reason to feel pleased with herself, some rare cause for satisfaction" (p. 85). Her psychological ascent, caused by the day's mission of buying Kevin's birthday present, gradually smoothes out and transforms into a plateau, which coincides with her geographical movement, her walk to town. I regard her walk to town as a plateau because during it she asserts the justification of her marriage and comes to realize that she has been granted atonement. Thus, from blaming herself for her thoughtless choice of husband to articulating the reward for the unhappiness she endured, her beloved son Kevin, the unnamed protagonist reconciles her past with her present.

"A Day in the Life" sees the most complicated structure of the psychological movement. In the angle of my interpretation, it has got three plateaus, two abysses and one ascent. The first plateau marks the beginning of the story's narration, which gives an account of Jenny's work day which ends with an envy-induced attack from her husband. The hysterics she goes through as a reaction to this attack, after which she feels that "she has gone to bed a different woman" (p.118), marks the first abyss Jenny experiences during the two days of the narrated time. This abyss is followed by the psychological plateau of the following day's errands of getting the children ready for school, numerous domestic duties, followed by the committee meeting at work and other appointments. During the meeting at work Jenny has a revelation: her contributions at

work are pointless, she will not change the system of nepotism, and her wishes to improve show nothing but Jenny's own self-indulgence and vanity (p. 124). Jenny's plateau manifests itself in the acknowledgment of her habit of ignoring the cynicism of others by smiling and being lovely instead. Thus, the significance of the first psychological plateau lies in the fact that it is exactly during it that she decides to stop smiling³ (p. 124). The abyss occurs when Jenny learns that she has a malignant growth which must be operated. Her contemplations on the weakness and inefficiency of God, on her love to children which will perish so easily, mark the critical point of the psychological abyss the protagonist is going through. Her anxiety and unpleasant thoughts accompany her through the other appointments of her day, which however smooth out and gradually transform in the psychological plateau of melancholic contemplations. Her ascent occurs meanwhile she delivers a speech on the luckiness of the girls of the 1970s, "for [careers and husbands] these days can be so easily combined"⁴ (p.140). The ascent, as investigated in the previous chapter, reveals in Jenny's understanding that the love to her children will not perish even after her death.

3.2.3 The 1990s

The chronologically latest stories, "The Merry Widow" and "Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale", written after the break of 16 years, have a pronouncedly different narrative mood and a much simpler psychological movement structure. Concentrating on the practical aspects of the journey (like planning and organization) and the English nature, both short stories feature a pronounced shift in the protagonists' thinking patterns. Rather than concentrating on the immediate issues in their lives, like their younger "colleagues" do, the mature women of the late 90s view the events in their lives in broader terms and apply their experiences in broader contexts.

As acknowledged in Chapter 2, both stories deal with the women of the (pre)retirement age who escape the routine of their family or work obligations and embark on journeys of self-discovery in the English countryside. From the point of view of the structure of their

³ In this line of reasoning, the metaphoric meaning of Jenny's smiling is the acceptance of the cynicism of others and the conscious choice to ignore it.

⁴ Ironically enough, Jenny's own "easiness" of combining career and husband has led to an estranged relationship with the latter. Thus, the advice she gives to the girls loses its value since she herself is a vivid example of the opposite.

psychological journey, the stories share the commonality of beginning with plateaus. Both of these plateaus have the element of anticipating the joy (and quite implicitly - the spiritual ascent they long for), which is bound to occur both psychologically and geographically. Both plateaus are characterized by the tiredness the middle-aged protagonists experience. Elsa is tired after years of abuse from her husband whereas Mary becomes aware of the extreme routine of her teaching work, which, combined with her dissatisfaction with the quality of the curriculum and ignorance of the students, makes her long for a fortnight in the countryside. After their plateaus, both protagonists experience their ascents – Elsa is delighted in finally being alone and having a small cottage with a paddock, and Mary being able to return to the place which witnessed her happiness and heartbreak some forty years before. The nature of the two ascents is common, but still slightly different, for, although both women do want to escape something, for one of them it is the past (Elsa), whereas for another this is the fear of facing the future (Mary). The only difference in the psychological structure of the two journey is the fact that Elsa, the “merry widow”, plunges in a short abyss following her ascent. This abyss, as acknowledged earlier, is her meeting the old man who mows all the grass from her green kingdom. The conclusion Elsa reaches, in which she provides an explanation for her being spared by “Father Time”, takes her out of the pit of her disappointment and forges her way to the plateau. Symbolical to this restoration is her decision to take up the course in the Renaissance art and architecture which she has apparently declined before (p.168). As for Mary, her geographical and psychological ascent, unfolding against the background of meeting her new friend Anne, provides her with a heart-lifting example of the active lifestyle one may have at the age of 60, and supplies her with “fortification” and good memories which will take her through the winter.

3.3 Different authorial perspectives on social and marital circumstances

3.3.1 Definitions and earlier research

When reading Margaret Drabble’s short stories in the collection “A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman”, it is hard not to notice a number of angles under which the short stories’ diegeses are presented by the author. By the different, or multiple, authorial perspectives I imply different points of view on one and the same social phenomenon which occur in the collection. These phenomena include, but are not limited to, loneliness, multiple responsibilities and social roles,

marriage, adultery, salvation, and personal victory. The multiple viewpoints in Margaret Drabble's short fiction have been acknowledged in Campell's "Becoming Terrestrial: The Short Stories of Margaret Drabble" (1983). Campell argues that even the multiple views which the omniscient narrator offers onto the events unfolding in the diegeses of the short stories can never "sum up" the complexity of human nature (1983:26). The most evident proof of this statement is offered in the stories "A Pyrrhic Victory", "A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman" and "The Gifts of War".

In Drabble's fiction there are also parallels, by which I mean certain similarities in the authorial representation of protagonists which appear in her novels and short stories. As mentioned earlier, Drabble's short stories share common grounds with her longer fiction. Many themes which have been appearing in her short fiction were later developed in her novels. This has been one of the objects of Jane Campell's analysis in "Becoming Terrestrial". She analyzes several short stories, accentuating the parallels between the writer's short and long fiction. The author connects male protagonists in the short story "Hassan's Tower" with the novels *The Needle's Eye*, *The Realms of God*, *The Ice Age*, *The Middle Ground*, showing that in Drabble, both men and women can be entrapped in the loveless and unhappy marriages. Campell compares Anne, the protagonist in "A Pyrrhic Victory", with the novels *A Summer Bird-Cage* and *The Garrick Year*, and Jenny in "A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman" with Rose in *The Needle's Eye*, Frances in *The Realms of Gold* and Kate in *The Middle Ground* (1983:28).

Campell claims that, like in Drabble's longer fiction, "the direction is away from the romantic and sentimental possibilities of plot and towards the terrestrial" (1983:28). By the terrestrial the author implies daily and commonplace experiences which however help the protagonists to change the perception of their selves and restore inner balance. It is worth mentioning yet another possible interpretation of "the terrestrial" which fits very well into the discussion of the two chronologically latest stories in the collection, "Stepping Westward" and "A Merry Widow". It is exactly in the analysis of these short stories that one understands that the term "terrestrial" can be understood even in its literal meaning. The protagonists' journeys (the psychological and the geographical ones which coincide), occur in the English countryside, terrestrial as a matter of fact. The notion of terrestrial can also be relevantly applied to the

analysis of the journey's structural elements, since they are devised in terms of movement in the terrestrial area.

Campell informs that an important aspect of Drabble's handling of plot involves "what she chooses to leave out" (1983:33). This is especially relevant in the handling of names in "The Gifts of War", in which the complicated name of one protagonist, known to the reader, is contrasted to the lack of the name for the other one. Finally, Campbell draws on Drabble's profound use of gaps which cover the circumstances of her protagonists' lives or their personalities; on her mockery of valor, like Anne in "A Pyrrhic Victory" who conquers the world with an empty sardine can, or Helen in "A Voyage to Cythera" who endeavors a life-changing journey feeling piercingly cold and having brittle ankles.

Let us now look more closely at the concrete phenomena which appear under different lights in the selected short stories in *A Day in the Life*.

3.3.2 Loneliness and multiple social roles

Loneliness comes in different forms, both as a predicament and as a desire, in "A Voyage to Cythera" and "A Merry Widow", respectively. In "A Voyage to Cythera", the protagonist's journey is a flight from loneliness and routine, and a hope of falling in love and reaching fulfillment in personal life. The outcome of Helen's journey is the experience of happiness of the others, which becomes able to partly fill the void in her personal life and nourish her. As acknowledged by Campbell, the brightly lit kitchen of Mrs Smithson's house is contrasted to the dark apartment in which Helen lives (1983:37). In "A Merry Widow", on the other hand, loneliness is a desired destination, an earned gift after years of endured harassment and obligations. Elsa's solitude is a desired and longed-for state of being, which comes together with her independence and the possibility of living the way she wants, a deserved relaxation from married life. Partly the same thoughts occur in the protagonist in "Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale". It is necessary to accentuate that these achievements take place during the journey, and prove that the disposition of the body is the disposition of the soul.

Gullette's view on Drabble's fiction as the bildungsroman of the middle ages finds a relevant application to the above-mentioned stories. In the cases discussed, the protagonist's journeys are

characteristic of the bildungsroman genre in that they depict inner progress, maturation and encounter with reality which occur during the journey.

Different women's abilities to cope with multiple social roles are described in "A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman" and "Homework". "A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman" tells a story of a perfect mother and a popular TV presenter who is efficient and multi-tasking, at the same time being balanced and caring. An opposite of this is the woman in "Homework", who is exaggeratingly determined on doing everything by herself but obviously finding it hard to combine the roles of a working woman, a mother of four children and a divorcee. She does not seem to pay enough attention to her children and, as the story's narrator Meg notices, is easily irritated with them. These are the cases of not being able to successfully combine several social roles, and experiencing problems which lead to unbalanced relationships with the children.

However, in spite of the obvious shortcomings of the unnamed mother, in "Homework", the author's sympathies clearly seem not to be with Meg, who criticizes her friend for her outburst of violence directed at her son. A superficial analysis of the short story supports Meg's view and makes the reader condemn the protagonist's friend for being unable to control her temper, probably as a result of the aggravated pressure of her multiple duties. However, the story's conclusion, showing the woman laughing in the kitchen with her son, shows Drabble's attitude to the self-centeredness of Meg, who only cares about herself, and whose uneventful and unburdened existence is opposed to the hectic life and multiple responsibilities of her friend. This shows that for the author, human selfishness is more dangerous than occasional temper outbursts.

3.3.3 Salvation and children in the context of inner battles

As analyzed in Chapter II, different kinds of salvations are presented in "The Gifts of War", "A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman" and "A Merry Widow". In the first story, the protagonist feels redeemed by the love to her child which outweighs the daily miseries of her painful marriage. In the second story, Jenny feels strong once having located her major fears and having reached a conclusion that love would not be perished by death. In the third, Elsa feels that she "conversed and [had] been spared by the Grim Reaper" once she had recognized the Time as her adversary. What is important, though, is that the themes of the women's salvation and victories

often have to do with children. However, as it is frequent in Drabble, in different stories the relationships with children appear under markedly different lights.

Unlike “A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman” and “The Gifts of War”, written sixteen and nineteen years earlier, the story of the merry widow offers a pronouncedly different view on parenthood. It highlights the selfishness of grown-up children, their implausible excuses of not visiting their elderly parents, but most strikingly, the story breaks the romantic stereotypes of the homey grandmas baking pies and indulging the little ones: “And the grandchildren – whining, sniffing, poking their noses, kicking the furniture, squabbling, with their awful London accents and their incessant demands for sweets” (p.156). This is one of the instances which enables the reader to track the change in the fictional woman’s values and outlook as it occurs during the different stages of her life. Moreover, the example in question substantiates my earlier statement that what I personally regard as Drabble’s biggest achievement in the collection is her skill of showing the big changes and the revelation of her protagonists in the context of commonplace, routine events.

Yet another example of the mother-child relationship is presented in “Crossing the Alps”. In this story, an unnamed protagonist has to take care of a severely ill (probably, mentally ill) child. The protagonist bravely endures all hardships of taking care of the child, of doing her work, of coping with her “dotty mother” and being a divorced woman. However, she admits that her husband might have been right in leaving her when he understood that she prefers the child to him: “and what man could ever have taken his wife preferring a child like *that*? A nice child maybe, that would be natural, but God, you should see mine” (p. 77).

Remarkably enough, the salvation and the important inner battles the protagonists win, unfold against the background of trivial everyday events, and their acquisition of wisdom does not require an extra sophisticated plot or amazing settings. All revelations are made during a regular trip by train, a presentation at a school, an ascent up the hill or during the walk to the town. This goes in line with Campell’s view that one of Drabble’s special gifts is her “ability to focus on minutia of daily experience”, at the same time showing its relationship to the totality of experiences which pertain to all humans (1983:43). The protagonists arrive at ordinary, somehow clichéd conclusions (like Jenny who comes to realize that love cannot be conquered by death), which nonetheless have the healing power and are genuine to Drabble’s characters.

However, in some short stories protagonists achieve more than the understanding of common truths as applied to their life circumstances. In “Hassan’s Tower” and “A Pyrrhic Victory” the protagonists achieve a broader vision (both geographically and metaphorically) once they complete the undesired ascents up the towers and hills. In both stories, the protagonists articulate their alienation from their spouse and friends as they approach the top. However, as they arrive, they concentrate on broader things than marriage or their immediate surroundings. Kenneth in “Hassan’s Tower” starts thinking about the unity and equality of needs of all humans. Anne in “A Pyrrhic Victory”, on the other hand, thinks she has killed in herself the liking for the things she considers banal like a beautiful landscape, when she has deliberately thrown the empty tin into the pool of fish.

3.3.4 Adultery

Although it is typical for Margaret Drabble to abstain from open criticism of adultery, the suggested happiness which can be achieved in it is still portrayed from different angles. In “Faithful Lovers”, Kenneth and Viola manage to be together for three years, behind the backs of their legal wife and husband. The reader is informed that over the course of their affair, they try to break up with each other, although unsuccessfully. Viola says she cannot sleep with her husband after she has broken up with Kenneth. An accidental meeting at an old café, in which they used to meet each other, is followed with the mutual assertion of their love to each other and rekindles their relationship. Although it is not explicitly stated what will happen, as it is typical in Drabble, the reader feels that there is a strong chance for the lovers’ new reunion.

In “Crossing the Alps”, the reader is being offered some sort of excuse of the adulterous connection. Daniel informs that this trip is an escape from a “frigid hysterical wife” (p. 83), whereas to his lover it is a flight from “the dotty mother, the cruelly defective child, the cruelly defected husband” (p. 77) and the obligations of her work. For both of them, the journey to Yugoslavia is meant to give relaxation from the pressure of multiple duties. However, contrary to the promise of happiness in the affair of Kenneth and Viola in “Faithful Lovers”, the idyllic outcome never occurs in “Crossing the Alps”. In my interpretation, this shows that Drabble uses a broader approach to such social constructs as adultery and does not adopt stereotypical attitudes to it. The author shows that each situation is unique, and should not be considered as if existing in a vacuum, without regard to the accompanying circumstances.

Discussion and Conclusions

In the present thesis, I have considered the functions of journey and ascent pertaining to the inner developments which Drabble's protagonists complete. The motifs of journey and ascent were analyzed according to the five themes of the discovery of the self. The psychological movements the protagonists make were compared to the geographical ones on the basis of the "abyss-plateau-ascent" journey structure. I commented on the multiple angles - the interplay created by the author's often contradictory attitudes toward certain phenomenon that she describes.

Irrespective of the kind of geographical movement the protagonist makes – a journey to a foreign country, a short trip by train, a getaway to the English countryside, an ascent up the hill, – it leads to an asserted, or re-remembered, understanding of the self and the sense of victory. The journeys lead to achievements which come in different forms. Some protagonists acknowledge their fears, such as the imminence of death or the implacability of time. In this way, they help themselves face their approaching retirement or the reality of widowhood. Others re-remember their old self and manage to bridge it with their new self. Yet others re-articulate their independence and self-sufficiency. For all of them, the journeys become the medium of personal development and the first move toward the new outlook.

Jane Campell maintains that Drabble's short stories clarify her progress toward maturity as an author. According to Campell, this maturity manifests itself primarily in how much authorial imagination is applied to the depiction of ordinary everyday experiences. This is exactly why the article author calls Drabble's short fiction "terrestrial" - it "grows into the earth" (1983:25). It is hard not to agree with this view. My analysis of the selected short stories in the collection has shown that the functions of journey and ascent, which denote the important changes in the protagonists' perception of the self, unfolded against the background of daily and even routine events. The conclusions which the protagonists reach may be trivial or obvious, but they nevertheless help them break free from the seemingly endless routines of unhappy marriages or multiple responsibilities. The protagonists may not be in power to change the circumstances of their lives, but they seem to be able to change their thoughts and attitudes which can change their lives.

Campbell claims that Margaret Drabble is not the author to offer facile solutions. Her stories are full of ambiguities and perplexities, open endings, of imagery showing “the opaqueness and mystery of commonplace objects”, but most importantly they show that the human personality can never be summed up even by an omniscient narrator offering multiple viewpoints” (1983:26). As demonstrated by my analysis, this becomes especially vivid in the stories “A Pyrrhic Victory” and “Homework”.

To proceed, two recurring motifs in *A Day in the Life* are the protagonists’ memories and the factor of geographical remoteness. In “Crossing the Alps” the protagonist Daniel says that his holiday in the Alps, which however results in the admitted hopelessness of the relationship, has ever since signified a “revelation of comfort”, some peculiar balance, and ultimately those memories sustained him (p. 84). The same phenomenon is observed in “Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale”. Mary Mogg admits that after her getaway to Dorset she brought “some magic” which would keep her through the winter (p. 227). The factors of remoteness are present in almost all short stories, but are most conspicuous in “Faithful Lovers”, “The Caves of God”, “The Merry Widow”, and “Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale”, as well as in the short story “A Dower House at Kellynch: A Somerset Romance” which has not been selected for the analysis in the present essay.

In Drabble’s short fiction, the element of remoteness is strongly connected to the one of journey and ascent. Moreover, in the short stories “The Caves of God” and “Stepping Westward: A Topological Tale” the three elements create a constant paradigm, in which each component is equally important.

Finally, let us discuss the title of the collection, *A Day in the Life of a Smiling Woman*. The collection is named after the short story of the same name, but does it not pertain to something more? It is indeed hard to claim what the editor had in mind when he gave the collection exactly this title and not, say, *The Gifts of War*. However, to me, the chosen title is very relevant, for it brings out the optimism which, heavily mingled with humor and irony, pervades the short stories in the collection. As mentioned, Drabble’s protagonists, each bearing her burden of different sorts of obligations, are never portrayed as victims or weak females, which pertains to the subtle

feminism discussed at the beginning of the essay. They all keep smiling: Jane despite the envy attacks from her husband, Elsa in spite of the years of her husband's painful witticisms, Anne because she conquered the world with an empty fish can, Helen because for several blissful moments she has forgotten her own loneliness and has reached Cythera, the island of love. But most importantly, through the stories and smiles of her heroines, the reader understands what could have been (or maybe are) the stories of Drabble herself⁵.

But here a question may be posed: If they smile, then surely they are happy?

The happiness which Drabble presents makes the reader contemplate on the nature of happiness as such and at times rethink it. The protagonists' happiness may come in different shapes and forms, just like their psychological ascents and revelations do. The unnamed mother acquires a higher understanding of things amid the hopelessness of her marriage, but is she happy for this short time before her dream and the day's mission lie crashed on the toy store floor?

The optimism in Drabble's short stories is revealed in spite of the critically acknowledged deliberate denial of romantic or idealized endings. Drabble's short stories change the notions of happiness and show that it can be achieved without the cliché happy endings. Her writing pertains to men as much as it does to women, since it shows that men on a par with women can become entrapped in loveless marriages. It is hard to say whether Drabble's protagonists can be viewed as role models, for more often than not they are no paragons of virtue or faithfulness. Still, the short stories in the collection will provide many, even if primarily female, readers with a source of unfailing optimism and faith.

Margaret Drabble's specific talent of portraying the continuity of the British women's lives throughout the decades of the twentieth century is particularly striking when it comes to the short stories in the collection. On a par with her novels, but on a much smaller scale and in a more obvious way, the collection allows the reader to instantly identify the changes in the British society by way of the account of the social background the narratives do not fail to supply. It is exactly the fact that the stories have been appearing for almost forty years which enriched them

⁵ Fernández acknowledges the autobiographical features in Drabble's short stories (2011:X)

with a complex, panoramic view of life, the philosophy which reverberates through each abyss, plateau and ascent in each life.

Some short stories in the present collection have a sense of incompleteness, which, however, does not inhibit comprehension of the author's message and the story's plot. The mastery of the author, her artful and versatile use of language, and her sense of humor, outweigh any tinge of disappointment which might occur in an open or undeveloped ending. Drabble's short stories provide the reader with more room for an afterthought, and offer numerous ways of reading. It is relevant to name the areas of future research of her short fiction. First, it is the author's treatment of feminism-related issues as it changes over the different decades. Second, the social phenomenon of marriage which subverts female independence and undermines the self. It is also the emergence of combined social roles in the 1960s and their influence on women's independence, and hence changes in children's upbringing as a result of women's booming careers.

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